FOLLOWING A RULE: WAISMANN'S VARIANT

Mathieu Marion
Université du Québec à Montréal
(Joint paper with Mitsuhiro Okada, Keio University)

In this paper, we wish to reconstruct a variant of Wittgenstein's 'rule-following argument' in Wittgenstein 2009, §§ 143-242 on the basis of passages in Waismann 1997, 119-124 and Waismann 2011, §§ 10-11. Although this variant is inextricably linked with Wittgenstein's own argument, our aim is not to propose a reading of the latter, but only discuss elements of it as it becomes necessary for our reconstruction. We thus begin with brief remarks concerning Waismann's collaboration with Wittgenstein, out of which Principles of Linguistic Philosophy came out, in order to establish the claim that, although Waismann can be read as having interpreted Wittgenstein more or less accurately, he also can be read by the same token as having devised an independent argument.

To establish the originality of Waismann's variant, it is useful to go back to Saul Kripke's controversial argument (Kripke 1982), which is based on the case at (Wittgenstein 2009, §§ 143 & 185) of the pupil, who, upon having been asked to follow the rule '+2', goes on adding '+4' after 1000: 2 4 6 … 996 998 1000 1004 1008 …
Although the example involves explicitly two persons, the teacher and her pupil, this appears to be inessential and Kripke focused away from this, discussing 'rule following' form the viewpoint of the first person: his characterization of scepticism concerning 'rule following' was thus oriented towards one's own inability to justify which rule one follows, on the basis of past intentions, dispositions, etc.

By way of contrast, Waismann's variation is based on a closely related example introduced in the Brown Book as language game # 62 (Wittgenstein 1969, 112), and recurring at (Wittgenstein 2009, §§ 151 & 179), which we call the 'guessing game'. It involves two persons, with, say, Smith writing down on the blackboard the initial segment of a series: 1 4 9 16
And Jones trying to guess which rule Smith has been following. Let us suppose that the game goes on the following way: having observed Smith, Jones deduces that he must have been working the first values of the function $y = x^2$ but, upon being asked if that is the case, Smith replies: "No, I have been computing the first values of the rule $y = x/50 \times (24 + 35x^2 - 10x^3 + x^4)$!"
At this stage, it is important to notice that the 'guessing game' is not an inessential variant of the case of the deviant pupil on which Kripke based his interpretation. Here, the second-person standpoint cannot be so dismissed.

Indeed, as Waismann points out, this shows "how unfounded it would be to suppose that we can discover the reason for a man's action by observation" (Waismann 2010, § 10). An important mathematical fact that underlies this point: it

is nearly impossible for Jones to discover which function Smith was computing by mere observation because any such initial segment, whatever its length, is in fact the initial segment of an infinite number of mathematical functions. The point Waismann was making is that one must distinguish between reasons (here: grounds) and causes: "So, we must distinguish between ground and cause, for we learn of both in different ways. The cause for his writing down certain figures may lie in the fact that he was taught so in school and that this teaching has created a disposition, e.g., left definite traces in his nervous system and his brain; the ground for his procedure is the rule which he states when asked for the ground." (Waismann 2010, § 10) Taking our lead from this, we will explore the role of the distinction between reasons and causes in Waismann's texts as well as in Wittgenstein's The Blue Book (Wittgenstein 1969, 11-15), and in his rule-following argument. In a nutshell, the point of the 'guessing game' is only to show that Jones can only come up with 'hypotheses' that are causal in nature, while Smith's admission that he followed a given function counts as giving a reason justifying his actions: if further why-questions are then raised about Smith's calculations, the 'chain of reasons' will eventually have to come to an end, and philosophical entanglement will only occur when one continues asking questions after that point, forcing one to answer with causal explanations.

To show to relevance of Waismann's variant, we will focus in the last part of our talk on parallels with Lewis Carroll's paradox of inference (Carroll 1895) in the case of 'basic rule-following' such as merely applying Modus Ponens, and on the current discussion about 'blind reasoning', in the wake of Crispin Wright's reply (Wright 2007) to Boghossian 2003. The point will be to show that Waismann's discussion of rule-following provides us with ideas that can be used to handle such cases of 'basic rule-following', while avoiding some of the difficulties raised in these papers, including the infinite regress in the 'chain of reasons' involved in the paradox of inference.

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